

The Ballarat Naturalist

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End of Year Gathering and Excursion to Victoria Park Grasslands Sunday 6 December 2020

There was a good representation of Club members on a cool, moist December day to visit one of our important conservation areas within the Ballarat city limits and to celebrate what had been a rather unusual 2020 year for our Club's activities. We met at the picnic area at the Sturt St end of the Park. After some brief introductory remarks from President Bill Elder we walked down Elm Ave to the western-most block of grassland beside Gillies St. Andy Arnold outlined some information from the Victoria Park Master Plan which recognises the significance of the Park's remnant grasslands and its management requirements.



Kangaroo Grass (Themeda triandra)

He also read a report by Ian Morrison on the last controlled burn conducted on this block of 9 ha of grassland on the 18 April 2018.

The grasslands were in prime condition, many of the grasses in flower,

notably the Wallaby grasses (*Rytidosperma* spp.), Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*), Spear grasses (*Austrostipa* spp.), Tussock grasses (*Poa* spp.), Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*), Common Blown-grass (*Lachnagrostis filiformis*), Common Wheat-grass (*Anthosachne scabra*) and Australian Sweet-grass (*Glyceria australis*). (photo above)



There was also a delightful array of flowering annual and perennial grassland herbs to tempt our enthusiastic photographers and iNaturalist recorders.

We were assisted in recognising plants by using several species lists; Indigenous Flora at Victoria Park, a compilation prepared after the last FNCB excursion to Victoria Park in October 2018, and a Victoria Park Plant List started by Pat Murphy with additions from FNCB members with notes on these additions.



Matted Flax-lily (*Dianella amoena*)



Common Onion-orchid (*Microtis unifolia*)



Two new species were added to the flora list: Wiry buttons (*Leptorhynchos tenuifolius*) (pictured above) and Sticky Everlasting (*Xerochrysum viscosum*).

From this point of view alone, it was a rewarding excursion.

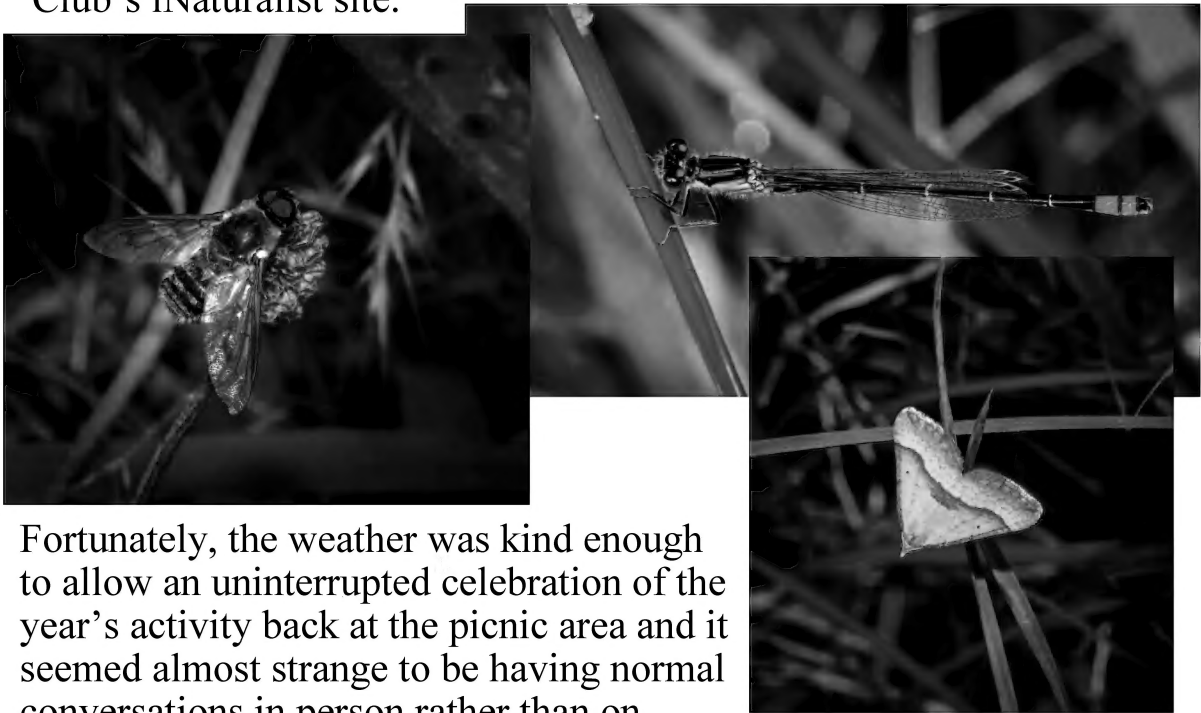
Species that stood out on the day were the Matted Flax-lily, Slender Onion-orchid, Grassland Sundew, Chocolate Lily, Blue Grass-lily, Yellow Rush-lily, Creeping Bossiaea, Common Raspwort, and fruit capsules of the previously flowering Milkmaids.



Yellow Rush-lily (*Tricoryne elatior*)

Due to the weather conditions on the day, insect activity was much less obvious but photos were obtained of a Banded Bee Fly (*Villa* sp.), Common Bluetail (Ischnura heterosticta) and the Golden Grass Carpet Moth (*Anachloris subochraria*) by Carol Hall (clockwise, below).

Andy went back to the site on 14 December and took photos of the Tau Emerald Dragonfly (*Hemicordulia tau*) and the Red & Blue Damsel (*Xanthagrion erythroneurum*) which are posted on the Club's iNaturalist site.



Fortunately, the weather was kind enough to allow an uninterrupted celebration of the year's activity back at the picnic area and it seemed almost strange to be having normal conversations in person rather than on "Zoom"!

Report by Andy Arnold



More images from Victoria Park excursion

Chocolate Lily
(*Arthropodium strictum*)



Rough Dog's Tail
(*Cynosurus echinatus*)



Sticky Everlasting
(*Xerochrysum viscosum*)



Vale - Helen Young-Harvey

Sadly, we report the passing of Helen Young-Harvey in December 2020. A death notice appeared in *The Courier* on 19th and Helen was cremated in Ballarat on 16th.

Helen was a keen participant in Field Naturalist meetings and other activities over many years, along with her husband. Recently, she had been unable to get out and missed meetings and excursions so much. She maintained a keen interest in all natural science subjects and her life is an example to all of us.

Field Report

My resident grey fantails tried twice to build their nest in a jasmine vine on my verandah but the first effort subsided too quickly and the second attempt still proved unstable with eggs still falling out.

I was very pleased to see that the third attempt, built in my stables, has proved successful.



Meanwhile, nearby, in my grape vines, a goldfinch has successfully hatched two of its eggs.



Geoff Howard

Escape to Queensland

I was lucky enough to spend just over a week in Queensland visiting family in Gympie and Gin Gin the week before Christmas. The lure of nature is never far away and visiting a new place armed with a digital camera is such a temptation. I admit that I took more photos of birds, reptiles, insects and plants than views of tropical islands or family members.

My favourite spot in Gympie was 50m from my motel room, and just across the Bruce Hwy.

This was Lake Alford Recreation Area which boasts playing fields, a gold museum (not unlike Sovereign Hill), playgrounds, and a series of man-made lakes. These shallow lakes provide habitat for a wide variety of birds and animals,

including breeding colonies of Australian White Ibis, Cattle Egret and Great Egret. Other species present were Pelican, Eurasian Coot, Ducky Moorhen, Purple Swamphen, Pacific Black Duck, Hardhead (above), Magpie Goose, Black Swan and Welcome Swallow.



Eastern Great Egret (*Ardea alba* ssp. *modesta*)

Australian Water Dragons and Eastern Water Skinks (right) were common sites along the pathways that wind their way around the lakes and parklands.



Butterflies (Blue Tiger *Tirumala hamata* (below, right) and Common Albatross *Appias paulina*)(below, left) and Dragonflies/Damselflies (Blue Riverdamsel *Pseudagrion microcephalum*, Blackheaded Skimmer *Crocothemis nigrifrons* and Common Bluetail *Ischnura heterosticta*) were prolific.



Another great place for observing nature was the Amamoor State Forest, a short 20 minutes drive south of Gympie along the Mary River valley. The Amamoor Creek flows through the area and a well kept picnic/day area is provided with a couple of walking tracks to explore.

I went on a short walk to “The Cascades”, a series of shallow pools and falls in a creek that runs into the Amamoor Creek. The day was warm and humid and sitting quietly on a fallen log watching butterflies, flies and birds buzzing past was both relaxing and stimulating. I took photos of Common Evening Brown *Melanitis*



leda, Wonder Brown *Heteronympha mirifica* (pictured), Yellow Palm Dart *Cephrenes trichopepla*, a Nursery Web Spider *Megadolomedes trux* (Family Pisauridae), a longhorn moth *Crocantthes perigrapta*, and even a fungus (*Agaricus* sp.)

Highlight of the trip was a visit to Great Keppel Island (below) where my nephew and I did some snorkelling in the shallows around Shelving Beach. We saw a good number of tropical-type fish, but no photos were taken underwater.



Part of that drive north along the coast included a stop at Agnes Water and the Town of 1770, where we paid homage to Cook, Banks and Solander who landed there in May 1770. It was pleasing to know that of the few Europeans to have landed on the east coast of Australia, the first ones included two naturalists – and their observations and descriptions stunned the world.



We enjoyed finding one of the noisy cicadas which accompanied us on the walk to the end of the 1770 peninsula - this was the Brown Bunyip *Tamasa tristigma*, below.



Needless to say, most of the species seen on this trip are not known in Victoria – and I did spend a few hours on “iNaturalist” the day after I got back!

Bill Elder

Field Report from Clarksdale

Emily Noble reported two new species to add to the plant list at Clarksdale Bird Sanctuary - Wiry Buttons (*Leptorhynchus tenuifolius*) and Showy Podolepis (*Podolepis jaceoides*) (pictured right)

Coincidentally, this is the second Wiry Buttons to be a new record in the area—see page 2.



The Rat Nats—Juniors Group

Juniors Return !

With the relaxation of COVID restrictions for outside gatherings, Bill decided it was high time to hold an outside experience for our Rat Nats group. The call went out via Facebook inviting parents and kids alike to relieve the stress of the school holidays for a couple of hours at least by spending time in nature.

A small, but enthusiastic group of 6 juniors and 3 adults attended and enjoyed a ramble through the bush at Stringybark followed by some lunch and a session on the swings and cubby!



Birds were scarce, but we did encounter some great insects which kept everyone entertained. Pictured is a group of bees found resting (or roosting) on a grass seed head.

Also, a Christmas Jewel Spider (*Austracantha minax*) put on a great show travelling up and down its web between some reeds.

Also called Spiny spiders, this group has six spines extending from its rather flattened body.

Stay tuned for more opportunities to join with the juniors outdoors throughout this year, as we plan for more regular outings.



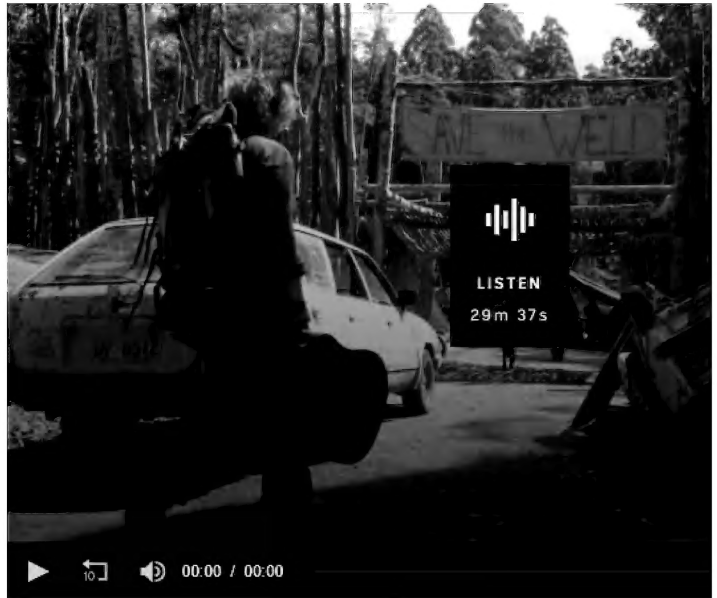
Forest Podcast

We are all involved in various ways with forest woodland ecosystems, so it is worth listening to a 2020 podcast on the ABC Radio National program 'Rearview' entitled "The Forestry Wars".

Speakers: Professor Peter Kanowski; Professor David Lindenmayer; Dr John Dargavel are all associated with the Australian National University.

This historical review mentions that forest management practices have made forests increasingly more prone to intrusion by fires. The podcast runs for about 30 minutes.

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rearvision/logging-australias-native-forests/12637038>



Field Report from John Gregurke

16 Jan 2021 at Beacon Hill, Enfield: Large Tongue-orchid *Cryptostylis subulata*, six plants in flower, some with seed pods (below, left).

25 Jan 2021 at St Georges Lake, Creswick: on east side at the start of path leading to board walk: Austral Ladies Tresses *Spiranthes australis*. First seen by Roger Thomas (below, right).



Excursions and Meetings in 2021 - Fill your Diary!

Feb 5 Grass ID and ecology Ian Clarke. To be held at the Haddon Community Learning Centre, 396 Sago Hill Rd, Haddon. 7.30 pm
Note: venue limited to 40 people - must RSVP to Emily via email.

Feb 6 (SAT) Grasslands excursion - Illabarook Rail Reserve and Clarksdale.

Mar 5 AGM and Club member's images: theme is "Pathways".
Venue is Haddon CLC, as above. 7.30 pm start.

Mar 7 Birds excursion: Avalon Beach and Serendip sanctuary.

Apr 2 no club meeting - Good Friday.

Apr 9 Extraordinary Committee meeting for planning Spring SEANA Camp as FNCB is host.

Apr 11 Insect and Orchid Hunt visiting Brewery Dam in Smythesdale, *Stringybark* in Scarsdale and *Lilwarre* at Monkey Gully.

Apr 16-18 SEANA Autumn Camp at Hamilton

For excursions, meet at 9.30 am at Gillies St car park to travel in convoy. Car pooling is not recommended.

There are currently no number limits for excursions, however health restrictions still apply, so please bring a mask and keep distance of 1.5 m between people. Of course, if you are not well or suffering any flu-like symptoms, please stay at home.

Committee

President	Bill Elder
Vice Pres	Margaret Rich
Secretary	Emily Noble
Treasurer	Kathy Elder
	Andy Arnold
	John Gregurke
	Les Hanrahan
	Val Hocking
	Graeme Lunt
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Meetings - due to COVID-19, meetings may have number limits applied. Members will be kept informed of meeting venues and restrictions as needed.

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